

My name is Rosemary Knobbloch Spatafora and my father sexually assaulted me from my earliest memories and throughout my childhood. I am 57 years old and have carried the memory and pain of my abuse my entire life. I am here today in support of House Bill 5699 as introduced by Representative Kennedy in December, 2009.

This bill is a step in the right direction in keeping children safe from sexual abuse because it will identify predators who have hidden behind the statute of limitations that protects abusers and gives them free reign to abuse additional children. Most perpetrators who sexually abuse children have multiple victims. According to Darkness to Light, approximately 70% of sexual offenders of children have between 1 and 9 victims; 20 – 25% have 10 to 40 victims; serial molesters may have as many as 400 victims in their lifetime. One of the most painful things that I learned as an adult was that my father sexually abused multiple other members of my family.

The statistics on childhood sexual abuse are grim – an estimated 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 5 boys have been sexually abused before the age of 18. Childhood sexual abuse is even grimmer when one is the victim. Imagine being a child and NEVER feeling safe in your own bed at night; imagine being terrified of being at home alone with the person you know will hurt you; imagine being victimized over and over again by the very person who is supposed to care for and protect you. This is the kind of terror that sexual abuse victims suffer everyday.

Research shows that only 10% of victims report the abuse to authorities. Many victims are afraid of what will happen to them or the abuser if they say anything. Many victims are

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manipulated to believe that the abuse is their own fault – or they don't know how to tell or who to tell. Young children don't even understand that what is happening to them is wrong. So there is silence, and it is this silence that allows the perpetrator to continue abusing. By the time the victim is old enough and strong enough to stand up and speak out, the statute of limitations has often run out, and the perpetrator is never brought to account for this crime.

My own sense of shame and guilt was so strong that I could not even say "out loud" what had happened to me until I was in my 30's and my father had been dead for a number of years.

Because my abuser is dead, passage of HB 5699 will not effect me personally but I know that there are survivors who would like to have an opportunity for justice and want to hold their abuser accountable. Just last night I heard of a 53-year-old woman that was sexually abused at the age of 3. She is ready to take steps to see that her abuser is brought to justice. If HB 5699 passes, she will have that chance. I believe that she and so many like her deserve it.

Thank you for considering my statement.

I give permission for this testimony to be used for the Judiciary Committee Hearing on HB 5599,
Rosemary Knobbloch Spatafora, April 28, 2010.